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Gwenaëlle AUBRY, *Genèse du Dieu souverain. Archéologie de la puissance II*

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politique dans l'Antiquité selon les écoles ou courants philosophiques majeurs, à l'exception notable des épicuriens. Certaines de ces contributions mériteraient une note critique plus développée. L'ouvrage quant à lui s'adresse assurément à tous ceux auxquels les liens entre philosophie et politique antiques importent.

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Gwenaëlle Aubry, *Genèse du Dieu souverain. Archéologie de la puissance II.* Paris, Librairie philosophique J. Vrin, 2018 (Bibliothèque d'histoire de la philosophie), 320 p., ISBN 978-2-7116-2806-3.

The present volume is the successor to *Dieu sans la puissance. Dunamis et energeia chez Aristote et chez Plotin* (Paris, Vrin, 2006). In that book, the author examines Aristotelian metaphysics as an ontology of act-potency (*energeia-dunamis*). Her conclusion is that the act that is the life of the unmoved mover is pure or complete actualization, which means that it has no further actualizations. In that case, the effect of the unmoved mover as first principle of all can only be as an ideal that is imitated by beings that can imitate it. She contrasts Aristotle's account of act as first principle with that of Plotinus who, following Plato, makes the first principle of all *dunamis tōn pantōn*, where *dunamis* must be understood as power, not potency.

In the book considered here, Aubry continues her examination of how the Platonic-Aristotelian background is developed within the Christian theology of the Middle Ages. She covers a vast amount of material, including Augustine, Peter Damian and Peter Abelard, Peter Lombard, Thomas Aquinas, and Duns Scotus. Her aim is to show how the all-powerful or omnipotent God of Christianity arises out of the Aristotelian pure act and how Christian philosophers worked out the idea of the all-powerful as an agent (p. 13). In the course of her introduction to the main body of expository chapters, Aubry presents a concise survey of the many problems surrounding the adaptation of Platonic-Aristotelian metaphysics to the exigencies of Christian theology. Above all, assuming that God is omnipotent in some sense, he then has an unlimited will, for any limitation on that will would imply a limitation on omnipotence. Aubry contrasts "puissance de tout" (*dunamis pantōn*) with "toute-puissance," where the former is constrained at least by the good and the latter is not. The theology of a God who is omnipotent faces the problem of evil, although this is clearly also a problem for a theology of "puissance de tout." As Aubry acutely observes, the problem of the compatibility of omnipotence with other attributes of the divine—especially goodness—is independent of the problems of theodicy, even if the latter is ultimately derived from the former (p. 16). In addition, the problem of human freedom inevitably arises if God is truly omnipotent (p. 22). The concept of an omnipotent God is further distinguished from that of the *Pantokrator*, the God of *potentia ordinata* rather than *potentia absoluta* (p. 27). The *Pantokrator* is constrained by the good, even if this constraint is not viewed negatively; the omnipotent God is constrained by nothing. But this fact opens the way to a myriad of theological and philosophical issues.

The first chapter focuses on Augustine who, apart from Origen, is probably the first to try to bring together the God of scripture and the Platonic heritage. Three points stand out in Aubry's account. First, Augustine refuses to make goodness a criterion independent of God's omnipotence. How the apparently evil is nevertheless good must

remain a mystery (p. 38, 56). Second, Augustine argues that God's omnipotence is in fact limited by the possible. Thus, God's omnipotence entails that he is *Pantokrator* (p. 57-59). Third, against Pelagius, Augustine argues that human freedom does not obviate the need for divine grace. That is, the logical possibility that a free person should do good, does not mean that he has the power to do so (p. 80).

The second chapter explores the dialectical opposition of Peter Damian and Peter Abelard regarding divine omnipotence. According to Damian, God's omnipotence exceeds even a putative limitation by the principle of non-contradiction, which Damian reduces to a contingent law of nature (p. 113). According to Abelard, God can only do what he in fact does. Thus, omnipotence is not the power to do more than God wants, but just what he does want (p. 126). In this view, God is omnipotent in the way that the Demiurge of Plato's *Timaeus* is omnipotent: constrained by necessity. For Abelard, the actual world is not just the best possible world, but the only possible world (p. 133). Crucially, Abelard inserts into the account of omnipotence the distinction between necessity *de dicto* or *de sensu* and necessity *de re*. It is possible (*de re*) that God should save someone, but it is not possible that God should save someone who deserves to be damned (p. 137). Thus, the meaning of possible is different for God and for humans. For God, whatever is possible is necessary, owing to God's omnipotence; for humans, the possible means being open to contraries, such as the one who is damned eventually repenting (p. 139).

The third chapter considers Peter Lombard and his opposition to Abelard and defense of Augustine. The central tenet of this opposition is Lombard's unwillingness to identify divine will and divine omnipotence (p. 145). Thus, God is able to do more than or other than what in fact he does. This claim is based on the distinction between "puissance absolue" (*potentia absoluta*) and "puissance ordinée" (*potentia conditionalis,* later *ordinata*). For Lombard, and other followers of Augustine, and in opposition to Abelard, God does not do all that he is able to do. He rejects Abelard's *quod noluit minime possit* by Augustine's *potuit sed noluit* (p. 151). The only things impossible for God are those which are incompatible with his nature. The remainder of this chapter (p. 150-174) surveys the ways in which the above distinction is incorporated into theological reflection over the next hundred years or so. This theological debate culminates in the condemnation of 1277, which endorses essentially the Augustinian position by identifying God's omnipotence with his autonomy. This is autonomy from creation or what is *ordinata*, and from secondary causes, but not from internal logical and axiological constraints.

The fourth and fifth chapters are, appropriately enough, the richest philosophically, since they concern Thomas Aquinas and Duns Scotus. The fourth chapter traces the Thomistic innovation of *actus essendi*, according to which Aristotelian act (*energeia*) is no longer ultimate, but is itself in potency to *esse.* Thus, act is receptive of and a limitation on *esse* (p. 178-179). So, showing that the first principle of all is *ipsum esse* frees Aquinas from the limitation that Aristotle imposes on the first by making it *energeia*. Aubry recognizes that, as *ipsum esse*, God is virtually (*virtualiter*) all things. Thus, Aquinas draws on the Platonic tradition, according to which the first principle of all is "virtually all things" (*dunamis pantōn*) (p. 183). That the first has this "power" is exactly why Plato identifies the first as "the Good" which is essentially "overflowing". The Scholastic *bonum est diffusivum sui* formulates this postulate, whether or not it is paired with Thomistic existentialism. So, against Aristotle, act becomes identified with power. Aquinas endorses the Aristotelian conclusion that the first principle is a final cause, but only because it is also the first efficient cause (p. 192). Thus, Aquinas sets his renovated

Aristotelian metaphysics within the context of the Platonic spiritual cycle of "stability" (*monê*), "procession" (*proodos*) and "reversion" (*epistrophê*). And God's omnipotence is identified with his nature understood as pure *actus essendi* and is unlimited in any way, since *actus non limitatur nisi per potentiam* (p. 206). Crucially, this means that there can be no real relation between God and creatures, since all real relations require that the *relata* be substances or composites of act and potency.

The chapter on Duns Scotus sets the problem of omnipotence within the refined Scotistic distinction of necessity and contingency (p. 231). Most important, Scotus transfers the notion of contingency from the realm of secondary causes to God. Thus, the contingency of everything is the principal sign of God's omnipotence. As Aubry nicely explains, the Scotistic account of synchronic contingency is essentially theological. That is, it is no longer located in finite being, in particular, in the capacity for alternative courses of action, but in the divine will (p. 234-235). For us, contingencies are contraries that may or may not be realized diachronically; they cannot be actualized simultaneously. But for an eternal God, these contraries become contradictories, because God can will them eternally as possibilities. The actualization of either one is contingent, meaning that God does not act necessarily, even though God is a necessary being. The actualization of any existent or existent state of affairs is purely the result of God's will. God can will a rock to be and not to be in eternity (p. 249). What in fact occurs is a result of God's absolute, and absolutely inscrutable will. This is voluntarism with respect to creatures who are entirely the recipients of God's effective will, but it is not voluntarism within the divine nature. That is, in God will is not prior to intellect or to the good (p. 254-263). Scotus thus collapses the distinction between *potentia absoluta* and *potentia ordinata* for God acts according to his own will only (p. 270).

There is a brief but provocative conclusion in which Aubry asks what is the contemporary effect of medieval accounts of omnipotence (p. 273). Her answer is that divine omnipotence has been secularized as the absolute power of the State and has morphed into legitimized State-sponsored violence. Her all-too-brief reflections on the relation of theology and philosophy to politics raise some interesting questions not the least of which is whether the politics of post-Westphalia Europe can be realistically counted as an effect of Scholastic metaphysics.

This book, like its predecessor, is filled with arresting insights and lucid expositions of highly complex material. The discerning reader will appreciate especially Aubry's entirely justified assumption that ancient and medieval philosophy contain together one continuous and portentous discussion of the most weighty and challenging matters. Her connection of these, both in the introductory and concluding chapters, is a welcome bonus.

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